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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 000383

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND DEMARCHE PRC ON FIJI
VISIT

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Aubrey Carlson.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On the eve of PRC Vice President Xi Jinping's February 8-9 trip to Fiji, Australia and New Zealand expressed concern to the MFA that such a visit would send the wrong message in light of international efforts to urge the government in Suva to carry out democratic reforms, according to Beijing-based Australian diplomats. The MFA downplayed the Xi visit, calling it a transit stop on the way to Latin America. In the event, however, the two sides signed new development assistance agreements during the stopover, further frustrating the Australians and New Zealanders. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Australian Embassy Political Officer Gedaliah Afterman (protect) told PolOff February 11 that the ambassadors of both Australia and New Zealand demarched the MFA separately to express concern that Vice President Xi's February 8-9 visit to Fiji would set back international efforts to persuade the leadership in Fiji, who came to power after a coup in 2006, to reform. The Australian Ambassador told VFM He Yafei that China should join international efforts led by the Pacific Forum to push Fiji toward democratic reform, but instead it seemed that China was using the opportunity to deepen ties with the country just when other countries were pulling back.

13. (C) According to our Australian colleague, VFM He responded that Vice President Xi's visit would only be a transit stopover on the way to Latin America. As it turned out, however, China signed several development assistance deals in Fiji during the visit, and Xi met with President Iloilo and Prime Minister Bainimarama. While Afterman suggested the value of the development deals was more symbolic than economic, he said that Australia and New Zealand were frustrated that these agreements and high-level meetings went further in sending the wrong message to Suva.

14. (C) Afterman said that the Chinese sought to obscure plans for Xi's stop in Fiji by omitting the onward destination of Xi's aircraft in the Chinese Government's application to the New Zealand Government to transit New Zealand airspace. He said the Australians were alerted to Xi's plans shortly before the visit when Chinese officials applied for visas to transit Australia on their way to Suva.

15. (C) In a February 13 conversation with PolMinCouns, Australian Embassy PolCouns Robert Fergusson (protect) reiterated much of the above and added that his Embassy was awaiting possible instruction to go back to the MFA and complain about the Fiji visit and its more-than-just-a-transit substance. Fergusson said the Chinese were observers at the Pacific Forum meeting at which the difficult-to-reach consensus was developed to push the Fiji Government toward reform. Although not a party to the consensus, the PRC would have known the Xi visit and its

results would be contrary to the hard-won Pacific Forum
consensus.
PICCUTA